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Do numbers count? Towns in early modern Wales

NIA POWELL*

Department of History and Welsh History, University of Wales, Bangor, LL57 2DG

ABSTRACT: Although early modern Welsh towns were small by European standards, appearing to follow Clark's model for Europe's northern periphery of localized settlements not closely integrated within a wider urban hierarchy, Welsh towns showing greatest expansion were commercial outlets for specialist produce within the wider commercial matrix of southern Britain. Their smallness indicates a role within this wider, integrated network rather than constriction born of isolation.

Playing with numbers has been almost an inherent part of the study of early modern urbanization, population figures having been used both as a primary criterion to identify urban communities and as a means of ranking them in terms of their role and function. As late as 1984, in his study of *European Urbanization 1500–1850*,¹ Jan de Vries' threshold for defining a community as a town was as high as 10,000, and Paul Bairoch's 1988 database of European urban populations ignored all those with fewer than 5,000.² Even in England, few settlements achieved this numerical measure considered necessary by continental analysts to support the sophistication in organization and variety in services, both professional and mercantile, which marked out urban communities as centres of civility.³ London, with its estimated population of 50,000–60,000 by the mid-sixteenth century, stood out as an exception but below this Norwich in East Anglia was the only other town of over 10,000,⁴ with six others only over 5,000. Close to the borders of Wales, Bristol, England's third largest urban settlement, could boast only 9,500–10,000 in the early sixteenth century, perhaps doubling that by 1700, and Chester and Shrewsbury were other major

* I am grateful to Dr Alan Dyer for illuminating discussion and support, and for providing access to hitherto unpublished material on the 1563 Bishops' Census.

¹ Jan de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500–1800* (London, 1984).

² Paul Bairoch, Jean Batou and P. Chèvre, *La population des villes européennes de 1800 à 1850* (Geneva, 1988).

³ P. Clark, 'General introduction', and 'Introduction to area surveys', in *idem* (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II: 1540–1840 (Cambridge, 2000), 1–30; P. Clark, 'Introduction', in *idem* (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1995), 1–21.

⁴ 10,000–12,000 in the 1520s, reaching perhaps 30,000 by 1700.

centres by English standards (3,000–4,000). In the context of continental Europe, urbanization in England thus appears almost insignificant.⁵

Against this background, it is not surprising that a question mark sometimes hangs over whether urban life and urban communities existed at all in Wales during the early modern period.⁶ Subjective comments about Welsh towns, particularly by travellers from the sixteenth century onwards, have been in general disparaging, as illustrated by Leland's description of Bala during the 1530s, 'a little Towne endowed with many immunities but peopled with few inhabitants and as rudely and unhandsomely built'.⁷ This opinion was backed by a perception that the number inhabiting each urban community in Wales was very small even by English standards and Table 1 illustrates the altogether lower league in which its towns were placed. The most populous town boasted a mere 2,000 or so inhabitants in the mid-sixteenth century. That, at least, is the figure divined in 1959 by Leonard Owen for Carmarthen during this period from taxation and ecclesiastical records.⁸ Leonard Owen's estimates have long

⁵ Bristol, Chester and Shrewsbury are relevant to the Welsh experience because of their geographical proximity. Philip Jenkins, 'Wales', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 133–40; R.A. Griffiths, 'Medieval Severnside: the Welsh connection', in R.R. Davies et al. (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glynor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984), 70–89.

⁶ A theme promulgated repeatedly in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II. 'To speak of urban history in Wales before the nineteenth century is perhaps to misuse the term', Jenkins, 'Wales', 134. Insofar as Wales had urban centres, it is arguable that the greatest of them lay in England at Chester, Shrewsbury and Bristol. Paul Slack, 'Great and good towns 1540–1700', 348.

⁷ L. Toumlin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary in Wales in or about the Years 1536–9 by John Leland* (London, 1906); William Camden, *Britain: Or a Chorographical Description of... England, Scotland and Ireland...* [1586]. Translated by Philemon Holland (London, 1637 edn); Henry Owen (ed.), *The Description of Pembrokeshire by George Owen* (1603), vol. I (Cymrodon Record Series, 1, London, 1902); John Speed, *Theatrum Imperii Magnae Britanniae* (1611); Benjamin Heath Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales*, 2 vols. (London, 1807). For late medieval decay continuing into the sixteenth century, Jenkins, 'Wales', 134–6; Ian Soulsby, *The Towns of Medieval Wales* (Chichester, 1983); M. Griffiths, 'Very wealthy by merchandise?' Urban fortunes', in J.G. Jones (ed.), *Class, Community and Culture in Tudor Wales* (Cardiff, 1989); idem, 'Modern settlement patterns, 1450–1700: the towns', in D.H. Owen (ed.), *Settlement and Society in Wales* (Cardiff, 1989), 228–9; idem, 'Country and town: agrarian change and urban fortunes', in T. Herbert and G.E. Jones (eds.), *Tudor Wales* (Cardiff, 1988), 74–80, 89–100. Overall disparaging comments on eighteenth-century Welsh towns are discussed and challenged in H. Carter, 'The growth and decline of Welsh towns', in D. Moore, *Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Swansea, 1986), 47–62.

⁸ Leonard Owen, 'The population of Wales in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1959), 99–113. His sixteenth-century sources were: (i) records of the 1543 lay subsidy, 34/5 Henry VIII, c. 27, used as a statistical base only for the dioceses of St Asaph, Chester, Hereford and Llandaff. Details of the grant and its collection in Wales (The National Archive (TNA) E 179 database) reveal material not consulted by Owen. (ii) the 1563 Bishops' Census. Returns for only Bangor and St David's dioceses survive (British Library (BL), Harley 594, 595), but cover the greater part of Wales. See A.D. Dyer, *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603* (Oxford, forthcoming). Owen's seventeenth-century sources were Hearth Tax returns, those of 1670 providing the most comprehensive lists of names. The 1676 Compton Ecclesiastical Census was not used, although Welsh material was available (A. Whiteman and M. Clapinson,

Table 1: Urban population totals in Wales according to the calculations of Leonard Owen

| Town | c. 1550 | c. 1670 |
|---------------|---------|---------|
| Carmarthen | 2,150 | 2,195 |
| Brecon | 1,750 | 2,210 |
| Wrexham | 1,515 | 3,225 |
| Haverfordwest | 1,496 | 2,137 |
| Cydweli | 1,120 | 600 |
| Cardiff | 1,008 | 1,771 |
| Swansea | 960 | 1,733 |
| Tenby | 950 | 826 |
| Denbigh | 898 | 902 |
| Caernarfon | 800 | 1,755 |
| Dolgellau | 700 | 720 |
| Pembroke | 632 | 1,202 |
| Beaumaris | 555 | 700 |
| Welshpool | 511 | 913 |
| Conwy | 450 | 635 |
| Knighton | 400 | 495 |
| Bangor | 400 | 780 |
| Radnor | 360 | 585 |
| Llanidloes | 324 | 814 |
| Montgomery | 308 | 678 |
| Cardigan | 260 | 435 |

Source: Leonard Owen, 'The population of Wales in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1959), 107–12.

been taken as standard figures for discussing early modern urbanization in Wales, but problems arise over their accuracy. Sources used by him provide lists of households or householders rather than a population total, requiring a multiplier, representing the average number of people thought to live in each household, to expand these into a total population figure, but his basic household count and multipliers calculated by him call for more critical scrutiny. This present article is based on a revision of his calculations and of methods adopted to calculate the population of early modern Welsh towns. It is now possible to calculate with greater precision the mean urban household size (MHS) during the early modern period, and to distinguish between urban and rural households, but there remains a considerable margin of uncertainty in calculating totals, with evidence for each individual town having to be assessed with care on its own merits

on household and population totals gathered by Bishop William Lloyd, St Asaph, 1680–6. (National Library of Wales (NLW), SA/MISC; http://www.llgc.org.uk/drych/Notitiae_for_digitalized_images_thereof); Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 492–503).

and total population figures treated, on the whole, as *minima*.⁹ A selection of these revised figures is given in Table 2.

Even with such revision, the general impression remains, nevertheless, that towns in Wales were small by European standards, both during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but this does not mean that, in Wales, the urban experience was insignificant. Attention has been drawn by Peter Clark to the wider significance in Europe of small towns, with 90 per cent of northern urban communities during the early sixteenth century having fewer than 2,000 inhabitants each, but comprising over half the urban population. According to his estimates there were 3,000–4,000 such towns in Germany, above 2,000 in France and over 600 in England.¹⁰ As far as Wales is concerned, within such a scheme the great majority of its towns fall into this 'small' category in terms of size but, with such communities treated as central to the urbanizing environment, urbanization in Wales too may appear more typical of the general European experience than marginalized, even in terms of number.¹¹ Wales would also appear, at first glance, to fit perfectly well into the pattern Clark discerned for Europe's 'northern periphery', where he perceived towns to be small and localized, and not closely integrated within a wider regional or national hierarchy that was typical of a more developed 'core region'.¹² But how valid is this?

The limited size of towns in Wales has posed problems of analysis of the urban experience, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, before 'small towns' gained recognition, when historians were preoccupied with ranking towns within a hierarchical framework based on their population numbers.¹³ Those centres listed as 'grade II' in the European hierarchy were regarded as just about sufficiently large to be 'regional capitals' in England – defined by Peter Clark himself as 'economically dominant over large regions', and offering unrivalled services.¹⁴ They were all over 5,000, however, a number not approached in any town in Wales, except perhaps Wrexham, even by the late seventeenth century. Below them were

⁹ For detailed revision of the sources used by Leonard Owen and further statistical analysis relating to towns in Wales during this period, see N.M.W. Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: revising Leonard Owen' (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Clark (ed.), *Small Towns*, 1.

¹¹ 101 towns, based on 87 places noted as 'towns' or 'market towns' by George Owen, 1603 (E.M. Pritchard (ed.), *The Taylors Cassion* by George Owen, *Lord of Kensey* (London, 1906), fos. 54–82), adding 14 other settlements bearing the hallmarks of urban life during the sixteenth century. Llanrwst, for example, had an endowed school, almshouses, a weekly market and a town hall (S. Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (London, 1833), Llanrwst entry; Soulshy, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, 172–3); judicial sessions were held at Abergele. Apart from Llanwit Major, Skenfrith, Raglan and Usk, the additions are in north Wales – Llangollen, Llanrwst, Abergele, Holywell, Mold, Tywyn, Corwen, Holyhead, Amlwch, Aberffraw. See Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns', for details.

¹² Clark (ed.), *Small Towns*, 2.

¹³ P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 1976); P. Clark (ed.), *The Early Modern Town: A Reader* (Oxford, 1976), including Clark, 'Introduction: the early modern town in the west: research since 1945', 20–3.

¹⁴ Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, 9–10, 45–50.

50 *Urban History*Table 2: *Population estimates for Welsh towns, 1543–1680s*

| Town | 1543 | 1563 | 1670 | 1676 | 1680s |
|--|---------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| <i>(a) Urban cores</i> | | | | | |
| Carmarthen | | 2,193 | 1,813 | 2,294 | |
| Brecon | | 1,816 | 1,825 | 2,102 | |
| Wrexham ^a | 1,505 | | 3,007 | 3,774 | |
| Haverfordwest ^b | 1,010 | 1,607 | 1,859 | | |
| Denbigh | 877 | | 826 | 1,368 | 1,495 |
| Tenby | 836 | 1,020 | 723 | 1,050 | |
| Cardiff ^c | 964 | | 1,371 | 2,428 | |
| Swansea | | 959 | 1,342 | 1,792 | |
| Presteigne | 663 | | 541 | 912 | |
| Ruthin | 632 | 867 | 1,321 | 1,096 | |
| Caernarfon | 653 | 816 | 867 | 1,075 | |
| Cydweli | | 775 | 502 | 473 | |
| Monmouth ^d | | c. 700 | | 1,005 | |
| Beaumaris | | 714 | 586 | 651 | |
| Pembroke | 607 | 678 | 1,042 | 925 | |
| Usk | | c. 500 | | | |
| Abergavenny | | c. 500 | | 990 | |
| Conwy | 474 | 479 | 525 | 576 | |
| Welshpool ^e | 474 | | 682 | 1,448 | 1,248 |
| Cowbridge | 342 | | | | |
| Hay ^f | | 306 | | 378 | |
| Lampeter | | 306 | | 366 | |
| Llanidloes | | 301 | 611 | | |
| Montgomery | 286 | | 549 | 437 | |
| Cardigan | | 265 | 359 | 380 | |
| Aberystwyth | | 265 | | | |
| Builth ^g | | 204 | | 351 | |
| Knighton ^h | 250 | | 409 | 454 | |
| New Radnor | 245 | | 268 | 450 | |
| Chepstow | 200–400 | | | 550 | |
| Llantrisant | 200–400 | | | 677 | |
| Newport | 200–400 | | | 482 | |
| Dolgellau | 117 | | 595 | | |
| <i>(b) Parishes containing urban settlements</i> | | | | | |
| Llanelli | | 1,020 | | | |
| St David's ⁱ | 964 | | 1,066 | | |
| Llandeilo | | 930 | | 1,207 | |
| Llangadog | | 900 | | 1,048 | |
| Talgarth ^j | | 842 | | 1,560 | |
| Llanstephan | | 469 | | | |

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Table 2: *Continued.*

| Towns | 1543 | 1563 | 1670 | 1676 | 1680s |
|---------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Laugharne | | 459 | | | |
| Amlwch | | 470 | | | |
| Holyhead | | 408 | | | |
| Corwen ^k | 326 | | 1,103 | 1,082 | 942 |

^aPossibly 5,661, 1676, if Compton figure is for men and women, not men, women and children.

^b1,859 conjectural, based on Leonard Owen's guess of 450 households, 1670. Population of c. 3,000 had been reduced by plague to c. 2,000, 1652–53.

^c1,125 according to 1546 chantry certificates.

^dPossibly 2,010, 1676.

^e932 in urban core, 1680s.

^fPossibly 533, 1676.

^gPossibly 527, 1676.

^hPossibly 681, 1676. Wide discrepancy between Hearth Tax data and Compton in Radnorshire.

ⁱTown core 268, 1670.

^jPossibly 780, 1676.

^kTown core 164 according to 1670 data; 510 according to 1680s *Notitiae*.

Source: The 1543 figures are based on evidence of the 1543–45 Lay Subsidy Rolls (TNA, E 179); 1563 on the 1563 Bishops' Census (BL Harleian 594, 595); 1670 on Hearth Tax returns (TNA, E 179); 1676 on the Compton Census (evidence taken from A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* (Oxford, 1986); and the 1680s figure on Bishop William Lloyd's *Notitiae* (NLW SA/MISC). For details of methods of calculation and references, see N.M.W. Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns' (forthcoming).

what were so-called 'regional centres' – social and economic foci of more limited hinterlands with a population of between 1,500 and 5,000 in the mid-sixteenth century¹⁵ – and below them yet again a fourth grade of mere market towns with a population of 500–1,500. Welsh demographers, including Harold Carter and Matthew Griffiths, overcame the fact that almost all Welsh towns were in this 'fourth grade' by ignoring mere size in Wales and concentrating instead on function as an indicator of internal, Welsh, ranking.¹⁶ Table 3 shows the ranking of towns during

¹⁵ 2,500 is the late seventeenth-century limit in P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns*, revised edn (Leicester, 1993), ii, but Alan Dyer would set the limit lower at 2,000 for 1700 (A.D. Dyer, 'Small market towns 1540–1700', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 435–50, at 425–8). 2,500 is adopted here because of use made of the *Population Estimates* in later discussion.

¹⁶ Harold Carter, *The Towns of Wales: A Study in Urban Geography* (Cardiff, 1965), esp. 29–50; F. Emery, 'The farming regions of Wales', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. IV (Cambridge, 1967), 113–60. For a critique, Griffiths, 'Modern settlement patterns', 227–32; idem, 'Country and town', 67–106; idem, '"Very wealthy by merchandise"?' 197–235.

Table 3: *Town gradings according to Harold Carter*

| |
|---|
| Grade 1 |
| Carmarthen, Brecon, Denbigh, Caernarfon |
| Grade 2A – thriving towns |
| Cardiff, Haverfordwest, Swansea, Abergavenny, Ruthin – possibly Wrexham |
| Grade 2B – intermediate towns |
| Presteigne, Beaumaris, Monmouth |
| Grade 2C – small towns |
| Cowbridge, Montgomery, Bangor, Bala, Dolgellau, Machynlleth |
| Grade 2D – declining towns |
| New Radnor, Newport (Mon.), Cardigan, Caerwys |
| Grade 3 |
| Aberafan, Aberystwyth, Bridgend, Builth, Caerleon, Conway, Cydweli, Fishguard, Harlech, Hay, Knighton, Lampeter, Llanello, Llandovery, Llanelli, Llanfyllin, Llangadog, Llanidloes, Neath, Nefyn, Newborough, Newport (Pembs.), Newtown, Pembroke, Pwlheli, Rhayader, Tenby, Tregaron, Usk, Welshpool |

Source: Harold Carter, 'Welsh towns in post-Norman times', in *idem, The Towns of Wales: A Study in Urban Geography* (Cardiff, 1965), 29–50.

the seventeenth century according to Harold Carter, primacy being given clearly to those settlements that had been designated administrative and judicial centres by the sixteenth-century 'Acts of Union' (1536–42) – Caernarfon, Denbigh, Carmarthen and Brecon – which Carter also considered to be regional economic and marketing centres.¹⁷ These were, to him, by function, analogous with the 'regional capitals' of England. Below these he placed towns such as Cardiff, Haverfordwest, Abergavenny and Wrexham, explaining their dominance as marketing centres for well-developed agricultural areas, but having only a local significance. In terms of general analysis, this would identify them as centres isolated from a wider economic or urban matrix. Below these yet again were towns described as being 'in check' or in decline because of various disadvantages that included lack of accessibility, a poor hinterland or competition from other towns. Monmouth and Radnor are given as examples of county towns that suffered as a result of economic competition from neighbouring towns of Abergavenny and Presteigne respectively. Carter adds, however, another rank of small towns that survived against all odds, although they had no economic *raison d'être*, as centres of administration in sparsely populated areas, including Bala, Dolgellau and Machynlleth, ranking them above a tertiary, heterogeneous group that survived from the medieval period to serve as market centres for even more limited or impoverished

¹⁷ 26 Henry 8. c. 26; 34 & 35 Henry 8. c. 26.

hinterlands. If some towns survived, others, such as Cydweli, declined and Carter concludes that this was a period of winnowing according to function, with Welsh towns still operating very much as independent, local foci outside any wider urban network.

But do revised population estimates add anything to our understanding of the relative status of towns in Wales between the mid-sixteenth century and the 1670s? Statistical uncertainty makes comparison less than easy,¹⁸ and lack of information about the period between the mid-sixteenth century and 1670, other than for isolated examples, makes it difficult to assess with precision any changes within that time. Perhaps the most useful method is to compare and contrast directly the number of taxpayers/households at the two points in time, a comparison that would indicate changes, at least, in the number of such units within an urban setting and, possibly, also an indicator of building density. Despite the drawbacks and problems raised by inaccuracy and different methods of recording information, figures gleaned from tax returns remain the most generally available sources for Wales as a whole, and have the advantage of being recorded according to townships within parishes, which allows urban areas to be distinguished from their rural hinterland with greater precision. Not applying multipliers to compute population totals would, at least, avoid exacerbating inaccuracies in the tax records. On the other hand, application of multipliers to reach population totals does enable comparison between estimates based on household/taxpayer figures and those based on ecclesiastical records of the number of communicants. It may not be possible to identify urban cores from such parish-based evidence, but the generality of information thus gleaned does allow comparison between the sixteenth century and the seventeenth over a wide area.¹⁹

In terms of the percentage change in household numbers 1560–1670, the smallest change is to be found in those very centres given primacy of ranking by Harold Carter – large within their individual regions during the mid-sixteenth century, but not growing in size at the same rate as other places by the third quarter of the following century (Table 4). Although three of those four towns remained among the largest in terms of absolute numbers, their rate of growth is comparatively depressed. Virtually no

¹⁸ Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns'.

¹⁹ Statistics for the 1676 Compton Census data were gathered on a parish basis, without differentiating between urban core and rural townships. They are useful where parish boundaries follow known town boundaries closely, such as Flint; undifferentiated parish totals are less useful for examining urban core populations, but form a basis for estimating percentage change in parishes containing towns 1563–1676. W.S.K. Thomas, *The History of Swansea from Roger Settlement to the Restoration* (Llandysul, 1990), 82–3, uses parish register information to calculate Swansea's population in 1631, 1639 and 1662. This method cannot be applied generally in Wales because of the poor survival rate of pre-1660 registers (C.J. Williams and J. Watts-Williams (eds.), *The Parish Registers of Wales*, 2nd edn (Aberystwyth, 2000), xxiv–xxvi).

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change can be discerned in taxpayers listed for Carmarthen²⁰ with 2.1 per cent growth only; a small 11.63 per cent increase in Denbigh; 24.15 per cent increase in Brecon and the largest increase, 31.25 per cent, in Caernarfon.²¹ This putative change in the administrative regional centres is in line with an estimated 26 per cent general increase in the population of Wales between 1570 and 1670 – an unremarkable increase.²² Applying multipliers to project household and taxpayer data into population totals would again suggest stasis, if not decay. Caernarfon would have increased by 6.62 per cent and Brecon would have increased also, but only by 0.5 per cent; but Carmarthen would have declined by 17.33 per cent and Denbigh by 5.82 per cent. Using figures in the 1676 Compton Census as a base, the picture may not be as indifferent for these major towns, but bare statistics again indicate that they were not growing apace with lesser centres. Caernarfon, on this count, would have increased by 31.74 per cent Brecon by 15.75 per cent and Carmarthen by a mere 4.61 per cent. Denbigh, however, on this count would be an exception, having increased by 55.99 per cent.²³ Evidence, or *Notitia*, collected in a detailed demographic census by Bishop William Lloyd of St Asaph in north-east Wales during the 1680s suggests that military foundations that failed to acquire an economic justification, such as Flint, albeit the county town of Flintshire, were likewise in stasis or decline.²⁴ By comparison, the percentage change in town dwellers in lesser centres was far higher, most notably those with commercial connections by land or sea or at the meeting of contrasting economic regions, highland and lowland.²⁵ This underlines the central role, during this hundred-year period, of commercial impetus rather than administrative status, and certainly rather than military function, as a promoter of urban development, making these towns at once a meeting place for exchange and a point of diffusion of money, commodities and external ideas. Table 4 again reveals households in the port of Haverfordwest, also a meeting place between the upland Preseli

²⁰ 1670 tax records for Denbigh are used to allow direct comparison with 1670 data elsewhere. If the 348 in the 1681 *Notitia* is used, then Denbigh households would have increased by 102.33%, a remarkable gain compared with other designated administrative centres, despite the proximity of Ruthin and the expanding Wrexham. The problem of accepting the 1670 tax record as an accurate representation of household numbers in Denbigh is discussed in Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns'. Evidence in 1602 Star Chamber depositions suggests a population of c. 3,000 (TNA, STAC 5/L38/22). This is a subjective estimate, but although it appears far too high, it may confirm the perception that Denbigh's population declined since the end of the sixteenth century.

²¹ Caernarfon figure based on 210 taxpayers, 1670 (TNA, E 179/220/165, rot.1). A 120% increase noted in Owen, 'The population of Wales', 109, and repeated in Griffiths, 'Modern settlement patterns', 231, is based on Owen's unduly high estimate of 351 households for 1670. He had not seen TNA, E179/220/165. See Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns', on how Owen estimated that figure.

²² David Williams, 'A note on the population of Wales 1536–1801', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 8 (1935–7), 359–63.

²³ The Denbigh increase, if 1681 *Notitia* evidence is used, is 70.47%.

²⁴ For Flint and Rhuddlan population structure, see Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns'.

²⁵ For lesser centres, Table 5.

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Table 4: Percentage change in urban population, mid-sixteenth century to third quarter of seventeenth century

| | Town (%) | Housds. (tax) (%) | Housds. (Notifac) (%) | Pop. (tax) (%) | Pop. (Compton) (%) | Pop. (Notifac) (%) |
|---|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| I Towns designated as regional administrative centres | Carmarthen | 2 | | -17 | 5 | |
| | Denbigh | 12 | 46 | -6 | 56 | 70 |
| | Brecon | 24 | | 3 | 16 | |
| | Caernarfon | 31 | | 6 | 32 | |
| II Port towns | Haverfordwest | 43 | | 16 | no info. | |
| | Swansea | 73 | | 40 | 87 | |
| | Cardiff | 76 | | 42 | 152 | |
| III Inland trading towns | Welshpool | 78 | 241 | 44 | 205 | 163 |
| | Wrexham | 147 | | 100 | 151 | |
| IV Small towns | Candida | 67 | | 35 | 43 | |
| | Knighton | 102 | | 64 | 82 | |
| | Llanidloes | 151 | | 103 | no info. | |
| V Declining urban population | Cydweli | -21 | | -35 | -39 | |

Source: See N.M.W. Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns' (forthcoming), for the statistical base and references.

hills and lowland Pembrokeshire, increasing by 42.86 per cent between the mid-sixteenth century and 1670, although by applying multipliers of 5.1 for the sixteenth century and 4.13 for the seventeenth, the population may not have increased by much more than 16 per cent.²⁶ Cardiff, a port linking Glamorgan with Bristol and the West Country, and also the county town of Glamorganshire, increased the number of households/taxpayers by 75.66 per cent but Swansea also, by dint of its location between lowland Gower and uplands to the north, and a port for heavy minerals, increasing by 72.87 per cent. Estimated population change in these two centres based on Compton suggests even greater growth, with Cardiff more than doubling, by 151.86 per cent, and Swansea almost doubling, by 95.21 per cent.²⁷

²⁶ Leonard Owen's household estimate is used, although his source is unclear. For subjective contemporary estimates, B.G. Charles (ed.), *A Calendar of the Records of the Borough of Haverfordwest, 1539–1660* (Cardiff, 1967), 98–100, 111 ('near 3,000 souls'; Haverfordwest Records, 286; 'upon 3,000', *ibid.*, 287; the town consists of 2,000 souls, *ibid.*, 580); and a note of 990 'poorer inhabitants', *ibid.*, 584). With 309 rated households in 1649 (*ibid.*, 1927–36), this would give a total of c. 2,270 inhabitants. An outbreak of plague in 1651–53 would have reduced this figure, so that the total given here may not be an underestimate for post-plague inhabitants. There are returns for only one part of Haverfordwest (St Thomas) in the Compton Census, with 100 communicants and 6 dissenters noted (Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 464 and 459, for the absence of returns for Haverfordwest St Martin and St Mary).

²⁷ Eight households in Swansea St John, 1563 Bishops' Census, omitted from calculation since there was no return for St John in Compton (Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 458).

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Growth in the number of households in port towns was nevertheless overtaken by the increase in inland towns which formed a landward link with England, concentrating on the production or sale of cloth and animals on the hoof.²⁸ Welshpool, for instance, with growth of at least 78.49 per cent in the households of its urban core – a growth of 144.08 per cent if the *Notitiae*'s household count is used for comparison – or Wrexham, whose commercial dominance in the north-east got the better of Denbigh and Ruthin, growing by at least 147 per cent to be the largest town in Wales. The calculated population totals, using Compton as a comparative base, would show an increase of 205 per cent in the population of Welshpool parish and 163.29 per cent if the *Notitiae* are used.²⁹ The development and expansion of smaller towns along roads running eastward from Wales also illustrates the importance of these landward commercial routes. Corwen, a new urban focus in the Dee valley by the late seventeenth century, at the convergence of routes east from the western coast of Wales and from stock-rearing areas of the north-west, is a notable example of such development.³⁰ In this sense increase in size is significant, and underlines some of the channels by which fiscal wealth was generated and distributed in Wales. In terms of percentage increase in number, the primacy of these inland towns indicates that during the late seventeenth century wealth creation was, to a considerable extent, by dint of exporting the produce of a pastoral economy.³¹ Of particular importance were those towns that had a weekly cattle market, where animals could be converted into ready money so as to inject cash into the local economy on a regular basis, encouraging rural entrepreneurship, and elevating purchasing power to

²⁸ For Welsh cattle drovers meeting English dealers at Wrexham during the 1590s see, for example, NLW, Great Sessions 4/9/3/73; 4/9/4/14.

²⁹ The parish is used for comparative purposes, total population, according to the *Notitiae*, being 1,248 (NLW SA/MISC/1466, 1467, 1468). There is no record of Powis Castle, lying within the parish, in the *Notitiae*. The figure given must thus be a minimum. Compton's figure for Welshpool parish was 1,448 – 1,427 conformists, 11 Catholics and 10 dissenters (Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 508). Comparison with the 1681 total suggests the Compton return was for men, women and children. The number identified in the urban core was smaller, being 932 according to the *Notitiae*.

³⁰ For the growth of Corwen, see Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns'.

³¹ Peter Bowden, 'Agricultural prices, farm profits and rents', in Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. IV, 593–669; also, 'Prices of agricultural commodities: annual and decennial averages', in *ibid.*, 814–70. Apart from industries processing agricultural raw materials, mining and metallurgical processing were also emerging, and may explain the growth in Holywell and Greenfield. Coal mining had also been developing since the sixteenth century, especially in Pembrokeshire; along the Dee estuary; around Wrexham; on the Shropshire/Montgomeryshire border; and in south Wales around Swansea and Llanelli. Lead and silver mining emerged in Cardiganshire and in Flintshire during the seventeenth century, and iron processing was carried out locally in small forges. Apart from ports such as Swansea and Llanelli which acted as export centres for these materials, industrial activity was yet to develop as the primary impetus for urban growth and expansion, however (William Rees, *Industry before the Industrial Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cardiff, 1968)). See also L. Williams, 'A sixteenth century example of regional interdependence and alien participation in the mining industry and exploitation of Cornish copper and lead ores and copper smelting at Neath, 1583–7', *Morganwg*, 3 (1959), 3–20.

support urban commerce. The significance of such exchange nodes was realized by George Owen as early as 1603. In his *Description of Pembrokeshire* Owen notes not having a regular cattle market in the county as a distinct disadvantage, and in lists of towns compiled by him c. 1600 he brings particular attention to markets that so traded in cattle.³² Owen comments further that the result of not having regular cattle markets was a low level of money in circulation, a factor common to all western counties of Wales, resulting further in lack of consumer spending power that was detrimental to other trades and commerce.³³ The low rate of growth illustrated by towns such as Beaumaris, Conway and Caernarfon may be a direct consequence (Table 2). By contrast, eastern counties were more well endowed with regular livestock markets. Wrexham was one such centre, as were Oswestry, Welshpool,³⁴ Brecon³⁵ and, indeed, Swansea³⁶ in the south. Llanfyllin, a smaller urban focus during the sixteenth century, also shared a number of these features, including a weekly cattle market.³⁷ This may be another salient factor in their expansion. Manufacturing specialization also concentrated on processing pastoral bi-products, such as glove-making already evident during the 1590s in Denbigh or, more significantly, woollen textiles. In the 1681 *Notitiae* for Denbigh, for instance, the occupation of 57 per cent of the heads of households is designated, of whom the highest proportion, 28 per cent, were glovers and a further 15 per cent involved in processing leather. This high proportion catered for a demand that was beyond the local, and is typical of several other small to medium-sized English towns during the seventeenth century that enhanced their connectivity within a wider trading network, and served also to expand their cultural contacts. Denbigh manufacturers may well have overcome the earlier obstacles to wider trading matrices posed by the restrictive

³² Owen, *Taylor's Cussion*, fo. 54–82.

³³ Owen (ed.), *The Description of Pembrokeshire* (1603), vol. I, 141, 147–8, vol. III, 'The dialogue of the government of Wales' (1595), 83–4.

³⁴ M.C. Chapman, 'The development of Llanfyllin as a market town and the 1789 Llanfyllin Market House Act', *The Montgomeryshire Collections*, 85 (1997), 26, quoting from Richard Blome, *Britannia or a Geographical Description of the Kingdom of England and Ireland ...* (1673), that Welshpool was 'well inhabited' and 'its market, which is on Mondays, is very considerable for cattle, provisions and flannels'. By contrast, Newtown, noted specifically by George Owen as not having cattle in its market c. 1603 (*Taylor's Cussion*, fo. 79) is described as 'an indifferent town which formerly had a corporation, but lately taken away; and its market, which is on Tuesdays, is not considerable'.

³⁵ Owen, *Taylor's Cussion*, fo. 78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 77.

³⁷ Chapman, 'The development of Llanfyllin', 26, quoting from Blome, *Britannia*, that Llanfyllin was then 'a good town, and hath a considerable market on Thursdays for cattle, corn, wool and provisions' and noting that it was one of three market towns in Wales identified by Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History*, vol. IV, 591, as specializing in the sale of wool and yarn during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. A 1669 petition to have the borough charter regranted stated 'y^e town is a great market for beasts, sheep and horses...and for all other commodities' (TNA SP29/Charles II/261/88). For the contrast between regions where regular, weekly cattle markets were held and western areas where they were absent, N.M.W. Powell, 'Trosedd a chymdeithas: dwy sir ar droad yr unfed ganrif ar bymtheg', *Cof Cenedl*, 5 (1990), 28–55.

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practices of guilds in other towns that had led to stockpiling products in warehouses, and laying off journeymen in 1598.³⁸ Seventeenth-century specialization was encouraged by the decline of such guild power. By the mid-seventeenth century the importance for Welsh towns of the wider marketing network is highlighted by the plight of Haverfordwest during an outbreak of plague there in 1652–53, which restricted the sale of woollen cloth and frieze in which the town specialized, and led to a perceived significant decay in its fortunes.³⁹ Vulnerability within this wider trading matrix is thus also revealed. Processing and trading textiles, particularly woollen cloth and some linen, was also evident in Denbighshire markets during the sixteenth century, with rural producers converging on Wrexham during the 1590s to sell their eels either to specialist finishers – dyers or shermen – or directly to factors.⁴⁰ Despite the monopoly acquired by Shrewsbury Drapers, cloth was sold independently at Wrexham, and sent from there to Warrington and Macclesfield as late as 1596.⁴¹

Statistical evidence points, then, to a symbiotic relationship internal to Wales between upland and lowland but, more markedly, to a parallel symbiosis between upland Wales and lowland England that developed in spite of cultural, linguistic and political differences. Thus, towns on the border between the two countries, located at sites of transition from upland to lowland, show clear indications of expansion, and point to the Welsh towns being part of a wider, integrated, Anglo-Welsh economic network. Indeed, the expansion of small market towns in Wales, at a more rapid rate than the largest urban centres of the sixteenth century, may also be greater than within the urban matrix of England, where market towns serving a local community, but also having links with a wider marketing network, saw growth between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, but not on a more substantial scale than larger centres.⁴² The reason for this arises partly from geographical conditions that may have enforced upon Wales an early specialization in breeding animals. Selling this product to external markets had drawn Wales already during the later medieval period into a trading structure that was beyond the local; and towns were important infrastructural nodes within that matrix.⁴³ Far from being an

³⁸ Charter of incorporation of Company of Corvisers, 8 Sept. 1598, quoted in J. Williams, *Ancient and Modern Denbigh: A Descriptive History of the Castle, Borough and Liberties (Denbigh, 1856)*, 129–30.

³⁹ Charles (ed.), *Calendar of the Records of the Borough of Haverfordwest*, 97.

⁴⁰ E.g. NLW, Great Sessions 4/9/1/21, 4/102/83, 4/10/4/47, 4/10/4/73, 4/11/1/19–20.

⁴¹ NLW, Great Sessions 4/10/2/21.

⁴² The importance and role of the small market town is highlighted by A.D. Dyer, 'Small towns in England, 1600–1800', in P. Borsay and L. Proudfit (eds.), *Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland – Change, Convergence and Divergence*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 108 (Oxford, 2002), 53–67. See also P. Borsay and L. Proudfit, 'The English and Irish urban experiences, 1500–1800: change, convergence, and divergence', in *ibid.*, 1–27.

⁴³ Caroline Skeel, 'The cattle trade between England and Wales from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., 9 (1926), 135–58; R.

isolated backwater characterized by impoverished self-sufficiency Wales had been drawn at an early date by this enforced specialization, into the emerging fiscal, market economy. Through these links progressive consumer sophistication was also emerging by the end of the sixteenth century in parallel with developments in England. Chapmen from south Wales and cutlers from Sheffield appeared in Wrexham by the end of the sixteenth century, and tobacco and ginger were available from a Pwllheli merchant by 1608–09.⁴⁴ This was sustained into the seventeenth century. Welshpool was praised by Richard Blome in 1673, for instance, in terms of the goods sold there, 'well inhabited, enjoyeth as good trade for English commodities from Bristol'.⁴⁵ This is a notable statement of long-distance commercial connections by that time, and significant in that it discounts the influence of the geographically closer Shrewsbury. Likewise, goods stocked by a Llanfyllin mercer, a freeman of the town in the 1670s, illustrates the growth of retail outlets catering for increasing refinement in the taste of local consumers long before the eighteenth century, and what appears to be a significant literate element among them if the white paper and one and a half gallons of ink in stock can be taken as a guideline. Other goods included luxury materials such as hair plush, glazed cloth, flowered and striped chiffon, white muslin, silk fabric and fur; fashion items such as bodices, stomachers, silver braid and silver cuffs and straw hats; satin capes for children; mirrors; currants, brown candy, sugar, spices and tobacco.⁴⁶

Whether further growth was stifled by the proximity of larger urban centres on the English side of the border is a more intractable matter. The two ports of Chester in the north and Bristol in the south, together with the inland towns of Shrewsbury and Hereford in the central Wales region, were geographically very close, and the overwhelming constricting influence of these centres on urban growth in Wales itself has been suggested by Philip Jenkins.⁴⁷ The domination of Severnside by Bristol may well have exerted its influence over Cardiff and Swansea, and Jenkins argues that this extended as far west as Haverfordwest. Although he contends that

Colyer-Moore, *The Welsh Cattle Drovers: Agriculture and the Welsh Cattle Trade before and during the Nineteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1976); T. Elias, *Welsh Farm Animals: Cattle* (Llanrwst, 2000), 33–7.

⁴⁴ NLW, Great Sessions 4/9/1/19, 4/10/3/50; Gwynedd Archives Service XQS/1608–10/179.

⁴⁵ Chapman, 'The development of Llanfyllin', 26.

⁴⁶ David Jenkins, 'A late seventeenth century Llanfyllin shopkeeper: the will and inventory of Cadwalader Jones', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 69 (1981), 45–55. There was at least one other contemporary mercer in the town, and an apothecary.

⁴⁷ See n. 5. For links between Welsh ports and Somerset and Devon, W.R.B. Robinson, 'Dr. Thomas Phaer's report on the harbours and customs administration under Edward VI', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 24 (1972), 485–503; S. Dimmock, 'Haverfordwest: an exemplar for the study of southern Welsh towns in the later middle ages', *Welsh History Review*, 22 (2004), 1–28; M.I. Williams, 'Some aspects of the economic and social life of the southern regions of Glamorgan, 1600–1800', *Morganwg*, 3 (1959), 3–20; *ident.*, 'Cardiff: its people and its trade 1660–1720', *Morganwg*, 7 (1963), 74–97.

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Bristol trade contributed to the very survival of the southern ports of Wales, they are described as 'subordinate communities within the larger Bristol region', reducing smaller towns to a lower status still 'at a tertiary level'. Similarly, he argues that Chester was the 'regional capital' for north Wales, with Brecon and the Monmouthshire towns subordinated to Hereford or Bristol and mid-Wales towns to Shrewsbury. The interplay between these towns may have changed over time, however, and it has been argued to the contrary by Alan Dyer that during the mid-sixteenth century improvement in governance and order on the Welsh border paved the way for a 'transfer in weight within the urban system'. Market towns to the west of the Chester-Shrewsbury-Bristol axis, argues Dyer, flourished and expanded their population at the expense of the larger centres, with Chester and Hereford traders complaining that the Welsh no longer bought victuals there, and Shrewsbury showing signs of serious population decline between 1525 and 1560.⁴⁸ Despite the recovery of Shrewsbury, continuing population expansion of towns on the Welsh side of the border into the seventeenth century indicates a consolidation of their status as successful marketing centres for their hinterland.

Wrexham certainly stands as an exception, its growth defying its proximity to both Chester, a city of c. 4,000 in 1524 and 8,000–9,000 by the 1670s, and Shrewsbury with c. 4,000 and 5,000–7,000 respectively.⁴⁹ Leonard Owen's estimate of 3,225 for the town in 1670 is probably below the true number, for he used the same source as for Denbigh, underestimated by almost 40 per cent.⁵⁰ A similar underestimate for Wrexham would give a total of c. 4,500, comfortably comparable to the 'regional centres' of England in numerical terms. The parish-based Compton Census of 1676 lists a total of 3,774 there, but it is unclear whether this represents 'communicants' only, or the total population. The returns for the diocese of St Asaph have been shown to be, in the main, men and women only, and if this were so then the population of Wrexham would be even greater at c. 5,600.⁵¹ This would, indeed, reflect its own challenge to be an economic, regional capital for north Wales that had supplanted Denbigh since the sixteenth century, and Wrexham would thus itself have constituted competition for Shrewsbury and Chester. The presence there as early as the end of the sixteenth century of a mercantile community,

⁴⁸ A.D. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), 21–3.

⁴⁹ Figures taken from Slack, 'Great and good towns 1540–1700', Table 11.1, 353. D.H. Sacks and Michael Lynch, 'Ports 1540–1700', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 384, make a specific point that 'no Welsh towns had reached the level of 5,000 in population before 1700'.

⁵⁰ TNA E 179/221/299.

⁵¹ Figures taken from Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 506; multipliers discussed in *ibid.*, lxvii–lxviii. Figures calculated using this method were, for parishes containing towns, on average 2.54% short of the 1680s Notitia figures (Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 495–503). Applying this average figure to Wrexham would raise its putative 1680s total to 5,744. No market town in Wales is noted as having 3,500+ inhabitants on Dyer's map, in 'Small market towns 1540–1700', 426. Wrexham should be added to that category.

including general mercers and silk merchants, a professional community including scriveners and lawyers, such as John Jeffreys, grandfather of Judge Jeffreys,⁵² an endowed school, a large parish church and municipal buildings including a town or shire hall and a tolling house to boot, reflects this. An expanding mixed manufacturing base during the first half of the seventeenth century, including parchment making, silk weaving, needle and buckler making and paper manufacture,⁵³ is yet another index of its vibrancy, and the ideological controversies which were fomented there, both religious and political, are also indicative of a mixed and dynamic urban community. It is significant that county gentry families established town houses here, such as the Salusburys of Lleweni near Denbigh and Trevors of Trefalun,⁵⁴ and that Charles I came to the town in September 1642, at the outset of the Civil War, to view the trained bands of east Denbighshire and to address a crowd from the building in the town centre known as 'Shirehall'.⁵⁵ If such a position had grown initially out of commercial and economic dominance, it was given further recognition during the Commonwealth period as the principal centre of the Province of North Wales under the governance of Major General James Berry and his commissioners. Its position was such as to be called by one historian a 'Puritan metropolis' during this period, suggesting further, however, that this was but a 'brief day of glory', and that with its loss of 'political eminence' came the decay, after 1660, of some of its minor gentry families. 'The decay of the smaller gentry', A.H. Dodd writes, 'opened the way for the emergence of Wrexham as a purely commercial town'.⁵⁶ It is not possible to say whether population figures for the 1670s conceal an earlier peak during the Commonwealth period, but the fact that they remained high indicates perhaps the continuation of Wrexham as a centre of commerce rather than its emergence, regardless of 'political eminence' as a factor influencing its numbers. Its success, perhaps, may be explained partly in terms of its linguistic and cultural background. With its Welsh or bilingual commercial community⁵⁷ it may have been more attractive, both as an economic and social centre, for sellers from its western upland hinterland than Chester or Shrewsbury; medieval prejudices amongst both Welsh and English did not die easily despite social

⁵² A.H. Dodd (ed.), *A History of Wrexham* (Wrexham, 1957), 48.

⁵³ A.H. Dodd, 'The Reformation and the Civil Wars (1485–1660)', and 'Tory Wrexham', in idem (ed.), *A History of Wrexham*, 34–74. For the town's morphology during the early seventeenth century, *ibid.*, 45–9. Evidence of its varied and vibrant mercantile and professional community during the late sixteenth century from Denbighshire Great Sessions Files, NLW, Great Sessions 4/9/1–4, 4/10/1–5, 4/11/1–5, 4/12/1, 4/13/1; A.N. Palmer, *A History of the Town of Wrexham, its Houses, Streets, Fields and Old Families* (Wrexham, 1893), 5–6, 8, 9–11.

⁵⁴ Dodd (ed.), *A History of Wrexham*, 41, 48.

⁵⁵ Palmer, *A History of the Town of Wrexham*, 8.

⁵⁶ Dodd (ed.), *A History of Wrexham*, 52–3, 64, 68.

⁵⁷ For Wrexham's cultural composition, Dodd (ed.), *A History of Wrexham*, 64–5, 92–3. Increasing eighteenth-century Anglicization is suggested.

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and economic *rapprochement*.⁵⁸ What is even more striking, however, is the large number of substantial towns in north-east Wales and the Marches by the late seventeenth century. Between Wrexham, Holt, Ruthin, Mold and Llangollen; and Chester, Whitchurch, Ellesmere and Oswestry only just over the border, there was within a 15 mile radius of Wrexham an urban population of over 20,000.⁵⁹ Urban influences were thus central to the experience of the inhabitants of this area, and contradict the view expressed in the *Cambridge Urban History of Britain* that 'To speak of "urban" history in Wales before the nineteenth century is perhaps to misuse the term'.⁶⁰

Population numbers tend to be taken as indicators of general prosperity, with population increase regarded as an index of relative economic advance and, conversely, declining or static population as an index of stagnation.⁶¹ Analysis of relative success or failure in England during the early modern period has turned on whether the size of a community at the beginning of the period was conducive to growth, asserting that whilst towns of 5,000 and over retained stable but unremarkable expansion, the increasing dominance of London stifled the growth of other, really large 'regional centres'. Only those marked as administrative centres of their counties, or foci of particular economic activity, retained their position.⁶²

⁵⁸ Gruffydd Robert hinted at linguistic compromise by the Welsh when entering Shrewsbury (Gruffydd Robert, *Dosbarth byrr ar y rhann gyntaf i ranas y Cymreig...* (Milan, 1567), address to the reader, n.p.).

⁵⁹ For Welsh figures, see Table 2. Oswestry had a population of 1807 in 1681 (NLW SA/MISC/1465). Estimates for Whitchurch (3,000) and Ellesmere (1,500) have been taken from Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, 121–4.

⁶⁰ Jenkins, 'Wales', 134. This disparaging view is repeated by Slack, 'Great and good towns 1540–1700', 349, comparing Edinburgh with Wales, 'it could scarcely have been further apart from even the most civil town in Wales'.

⁶¹ P. Clark, 'Small towns 1700–1840', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 737, 'the great majority of basic market towns in Wales had below 1,000 inhabitants in the early eighteenth century, a reflection of low population densities and the sluggish, underdeveloped nature of the economy'.

⁶² For ranking towns, W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (London, 1959), 174–8. For debate over the growth or decline of English towns from the end of the medieval period, A.R. Bridbury, *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages* (2nd edn, London, 1975); R.B. Dobson, 'Urban decline in late medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 27 (1977), 1–22; N.R. Goose, 'In search of the urban variable: towns and the English economy 1500–1650', *Economic History Review*, 39 (1986), 165–85; Dyer, *Decline and Growth*. For the role of small towns, Alan Everitt, 'Marketing agricultural produce: the market town', in Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History*, vol. IV, 467–589, esp. 467–79; Clark and Slack, *English Towns in Transition*, 17–25; J. Patten, *English Towns 1500–1700* (Cambridge, 1978); P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700–1800* (Oxford, 1982); *idem*, 'Small towns: large implications; social and cultural roles of small towns in eighteenth century England and Wales', *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 10 (1987), 125–38; Clark (ed.), *Small Towns*, esp. *idem*, 'Introduction', 1–21, and 'Small towns in England 1550–1850: national and regional population trends', 90–120. For a more negative view of their fate in the late seventeenth century, J. Chartres, 'The marketing of agricultural produce in metropolitan western England in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Exeter Papers in Economic History*, 8, (1973), 63–74. A less prescriptive analysis, emphasizing their diversity of experience, is given in A.D. Dyer, 'The market towns of southern England 1500–1700', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), 123–34, and *idem*, 'Small market towns 1540–1700'. For towns in Cumbria, a region which shared some of Wales' geographical conditions but with

This model may not be directly applicable to Wales because of the paucity of towns that were, indeed, above the 2,500 set as an upper limit for the designation 'small'.⁶³ It may be possible, however, to adapt the model for the Welsh situation. The rather static profile of towns deemed 'regional centres' in Wales can be equated with the English towns of 5,000 or more, with the presence of Bristol, Shrewsbury and Chester possibly tending to stifle the development of larger towns in the same way as London stifled the development of larger 'regional centres' in England, but the expansion of Wrexham noted above defies such explanation. English interest has also turned to smaller market towns. Some have interpreted the decline or stagnation of 'regional centres' as an opportunity for these smaller market towns to flourish as centres of consumption and distribution serving an area defined by easy communications; the inability of larger urban communities to expand, it is argued, then allowed a denser network of towns yet smaller in size to remain viable as commercial centres within local hinterlands, their growth equalling larger centres.⁶⁴

Do numbers, then, suggest contiguity or contrast between the Welsh experience and that of England? Significantly, the percentage increase in the size of some small towns between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries suggests the continued viability of a large number of small towns, and the continued survival of some very small ones. Unlike England, however, the increase in their population appears to be, in many cases, higher than for the larger towns. There was a 151 per cent increase in the household base of Llanidloes, for instance, from 59 to 148, and the townsfolk displayed their municipal confidence by building, in c. 1600, a fine town hall which still stands, and where the county assize sessions were held from time to time.⁶⁵ The 69 per cent rise in the household numbers for Cardigan is also notable.⁶⁶ In the case of these successful smaller towns, there was a greater percentage increase in their size than in their hinterland, suggesting that it was not so much a natural population increase as a case of attracting from the surrounding area. The growth in the households of Cardiganshire between 1543 and 1670 was by a mere 15 per cent, far lower than for Cardigan town. More dramatically, whereas Llanidloes grew by 151 per cent the household increase estimated for

a contrasting pattern of urban development. J. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation of the Cumbrian market town, 1600–1900', *Northern History*, 19 (1983), 128–209; R. Millward, 'The Cumbrian town between 1600 and 1800', in C. Chalkin and M.A. Havinden (eds.), *Rural Change and Urban Growth 1500–1800: Essays in Regional History in Honour of W.G. Hoskins* (London, 1974), 202–28. Statistical information for England is given in Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*. For a perceptive discussion of these theories in a Welsh context, and the development of a Welsh urban network, see Griffiths, 'Modern settlement patterns', 227–32.

⁶³ N. 15.

⁶⁴ Nn. 42, 62.

⁶⁵ C.E. Vaughan Owen, 'Llanidloes Market Hall', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 61 (1969–70), 58–64.

⁶⁶ Owen, 'The population of Wales', 108.

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the hundred of Llanidloes in which the town was located was a mere 8 per cent.⁶⁷ In conjunction with this, the fact that the MHS of urban households, according to *Notitiae* evidence discussed above, was lower than in surrounding rural households again suggests that expansion was by dint of inward migration.

The mixed pattern of survival of smaller towns in Wales is more in line with that of smaller market towns in England, with some there moving from the 300–500 population bracket into the 500–1,000 drawing mainly from their hinterland, but others losing their *raison d'être* and falling into crisis and decay.⁶⁸ For Wales, it has been argued that due to political fragmentation during the medieval period it had far too many urban foundations, many associated with military foundations – what Matthew Griffiths called 'a far greater density of town foundations in relation to population than was the case in England'.⁶⁹ A change in the administrative order decreed by the 'Acts of Union'⁷⁰ gave official sanction to local power in Wales being wielded by Welshmen, and simultaneously diminished seigneurial power. As a result, the *raison d'être* of some towns as military centres or as seigneurial *capita* came to an end, and with this a number of 'decaying' medieval towns such as Trelech in Monmouthshire or Dryslwyn in Carmarthenshire could be expected. Observations concerning decaying foundations and decreasing numbers are, indeed, listed one after another by commentators from John Leland and William Camden in the sixteenth century, John Speed and George Owen in the early seventeenth, to Benjamin Heath Malkin during the eighteenth. The overwhelming subjective impression is of an almost anti-urban and quaintly uncivil society in Wales.⁷¹ And yet, Table 5 indicates the survival, if not increase in numerical terms, of smaller medieval urban centres, despite their diminished role; mere numbers, indeed, indicate a revival in the fortunes of some of these units by the seventeenth century. Comments by Leland, for instance, suggest a terminal decline in Narberth, 'Ther is a poore village', but in terms of population it appears to have quadrupled in size between 1563 and 1676, from c. 163 to 488, and had a flourishing specialist hat-making industry.⁷² Likewise, Rosemarket, of which Leland said 'The market is lost, and is now a poore village', saw an increase of 47.24 per cent in its population between 1563 and

⁶⁷ Household statistics, *ibid.*, 108, 111.

⁶⁸ Changing English urban populations calculated from Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, 1–184. For the Welsh listing, see nn. 12, 78. A varying pattern of survival and decline in English small towns is argued in Dyer, 'Small market towns 1540–1700'.

⁶⁹ Griffiths, 'Very wealthy by merchandise?', 198–201.

⁷⁰ 27 Henry VIII, c. 26; 34 & 35 Henry VIII, c. 26.

⁷¹ See n. 17.

⁷² The raw figure for Narberth in Compton is 325. Whiteman suggests that this represents men and women only. Applying a 1.5 multiplier gives a total of 488. (Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 460, 463.) 101 taxpayers in 1670 gives a notional total of 427. See also Toumlin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary in Wales*, 62.

Table 5: *Pembrokeshire urban settlements, showing the survival and recovery of small units*

| Town | 1,563 | Town | 1670s |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|
| Haverfordwest | 1,607 | Haverfordwest | 1,859 |
| Tenby | 1,020–1,200 | Pembroke | 1,045 |
| Pembroke | 678 | Tenby | 725–1,000 |
| Llawhaden | 332 | Narberth | 488 |
| St Dogmael's | 306 | Wiston | 406 |
| Newport | 255 | St Dogmael's | 402 |
| Narberth | 163 | Fishguard | 360 |
| Rosemarket | 163 | Llawhaden | 357 |
| Fishguard | 158 | Newport | 334 |
| Cilgerran | 153 | Cilgerran | 294 |
| Slebech | 133 | St David's | 268 |
| Dale | 128 | Slebech | 241 |
| Newmoat | 123 | Rosemarket | 240 |
| Wiston | 123 | Dale | 228 |
| St David's | | Newmoat | 200 |

Source: For methods of calculation and references, see N.M.W. Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns' (forthcoming).

1676, and may have survived as a local focus despite the proximity of the more diversified and larger Haverfordwest.⁷³ Albeit diminishing in status, these remained considerable concentrations of population and local foci, occupying a lower, sub-urban tier within the hinterland of centres possessing a stronger commercial, administrative or legal identity and purpose, but at the same time remaining an integral part of the wider urban network, almost as satellite settlements. Their survival and growth into the seventeenth century may even have had an effect on population numbers in a nearby, larger 'regional' market. The population increase of Haverfordwest or Pembroke may well have been higher but for the sustained presence of smaller units such as Newmoat, Wiston, Rosemarket or Dale. Tenby, for instance, was reduced to complain about the expansion of Narberth's market during the seventeenth century, petitioning the king for its suppression in 1671, suggesting that Narberth had reclaimed a commercial role and status that challenged Tenby.⁷⁴

The existence in Wales of what can be termed this 'organic' development can be contrasted with the situation in Ireland, where political instability, and a policy of placing governance in the hands of non-Irish administrators, induced the foundation there of some towns

⁷³ Dyer, *The Diocesan Population Returns*, 261; Whiteman, *The Compton Census*, 461, 463; Toumlin Smith (ed.), *Tir Itinerary in Wales*, 63.

⁷⁴ B.E. and K.E. Howells, *Pembrokeshire Life: 1572–1843* (Haverfordwest, 1972), 48–52.

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as deliberate social and political constructs to underpin the *mores* of the rulers. Whereas this may have been paralleled in medieval Wales by the foundation of towns associated with castles as agents of seigneurial rule it was certainly absent during the early modern period.⁷⁵ Indeed, the consequence of the proliferation of medieval urban foundations can also be interpreted in a different light. Soulsby has argued that their 'existence as trading centres gave further encouragement to the growth of a predominantly money economy and a more sophisticated commercial life'. This accords with the early emergence of commercial pastoral agriculture and the long-distance trade in pastoral produce,⁷⁶ and indicates a habituation of the Welsh, already during the medieval period, with urban services and structures. Wales may, in this light, be considered an early participant within a greater urban matrix beyond its borders rather than an anti-urban economic backwater stifled by isolationism. Against such a background, it is not surprising that 'winnowing', or rationalization of status, should take place in accordance with the commercial and economic heartbeat of the period, but despite such winnowing mid-seventeenth-century Wales was left with almost as many settlements recognized in contemporary lists as towns as during the medieval period.⁷⁷ There may have been fewer towns per county than in England by 1670 – the average number of small towns per county in England was 21, whereas in Wales it was a mere 7.8⁷⁸ – but the great majority of those listed did retain their urban identity until the twentieth century.⁷⁹

This pattern does not correspond to Clark's model for Europe's 'northern periphery' of small, localized urban units not closely integrated within a wider regional or national hierarchy.⁸⁰ Nor is the urban structure in Wales as a whole, an upland pastoral region, what one would expect from the English pattern, where the uplands of the mid-sixteenth century had the lowest percentage of its towns below 500 (14 per cent) and the highest percentage of its towns over 2,000 (29 per cent).⁸¹ Such large-scale urbanization, in terms of the size of individual settlements, was not a feature of mid-sixteenth-century Wales. Likewise, during the early seventeenth century, a discernible migration from the land to cities of over 4,000 associated with increasing rural, agrarian unemployment – 'subsistence migration' – meant in England an expanding population in

⁷⁵ Borsay and Proudfoot, 'The English and Irish urban experience', 1–13. The 1543 'Act of Union' provided a seven-year mechanism to disenfranchise and replace smaller, seigneurially created boroughs by those 'more apt and convenient...for the Wealth of the...country'. There is no evidence of implementation.

⁷⁶ Skeet, 'The cattle trade', 135–58.

⁷⁷ Soulsby, *Towns of Medieval Wales*, lists 111 medieval towns. See n. 11. Narberth emerged to challenge Tenby during the seventeenth century after it was granted a market in 1652 (Howells and Howells, *Pembrokeshire Life*, 32, 48–52).

⁷⁸ English figures from Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, 1–184.

⁷⁹ See n. 11. 19 towns would now be considered villages, giving an 81% survival rate.

⁸⁰ Clark (ed.), *Small Towns*, 2

⁸¹ Based on Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, 1–184.

centres such as Coventry, Worcester and London.⁸² English urbanization thus reflected, in part, agrarian crisis, with the push from the land as strong as any positive urban attraction. Wales as a region, perhaps curiously, fared more like the agriculturally prosperous areas of lowland East Anglia and southern England in terms of the continuing high percentage of small towns below 500 and a low percentage of towns of over 2,000.⁸³ Perhaps these two points of comparison may suggest, once again rather provocingly, that the smallness of Welsh towns reflected not economic backwardness and stagnation but balance and relative prosperity within its rural economy, particularly from the second decade of the seventeenth century when the price for primary pastoral products – animals – remained at a constant profitable level,⁸⁴ and participation in an interlinked urban network. This again points to the integration of Wales into an Anglo-Welsh economic matrix pertaining to the southern parts of the British Isles. On the other hand, it also speaks of a contrast between England and Wales, reflecting the lower 'labour' requirements of a pastoral economy, and thus a lesser pool of underemployed agricultural labourers during the seventeenth century. In other words, the push towards the town in Wales, despite the attempt by Swansea in 1603 to stop poor migrants from settling there,⁸⁵ was generally less than in many arable areas of England. And within this perspective perhaps one can yet dispel some of the negative assumptions about lack of economic activity and prosperity – images of a somewhat backward and conservative cultural ambience lacking in civility too – that have been projected so often on the back of perceptions of an urban population small in number in early modern Wales.

⁸² A.D. Dyer, *The City of Worcester in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1973); P. Slack, 'Vagrants and vagrancy in England, 1598–1664', in P. Clark and D. Souden (eds.), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (London, 1987), 49–76; J. Landers and R. Tyson, 'Population and disease, estrangement and belonging 1540–1700', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 198–9.

⁸³ English figures based on Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, 1–184; for Wales see Powell, 'The population of Welsh towns', and n. 12. During the mid-sixteenth century 1.6% of East Anglian 'small' towns were 2,000<, whereas 49% were <500; in southern England 6.5% of towns were then 2,000<, and 34% <500. By comparison, 29% of northern upland towns were 2,000<, and with 32 listed had by far the greatest number of such towns, but only 14% were <500. For Wales, the comparative figures were 1.47% 2,000< in the mid-sixteenth century and a very high 70.58% <500; by the late seventeenth century this changed to 4.6% 2,000< and still a high 49% <500. East Anglia by then had 4.2% of its 'small' towns 2,000< and 30% <500.

⁸⁴ For symbiosis between towns and their rural hinterland, and the effect of metropolitan demand on agricultural prosperity, P. Glennie and I. Whyte, 'Towns in an agrarian economy 1540–1700', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 167–93, but scant reference is given to the cattle trade so important for Wales; A. Charnes, 'Food consumption and internal trade', in A.L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1550–1700: The Making of a Metropolis* (London, 1986), 168–96. For comparison with Scotland, M. Lynch, 'Urbanisation and urban networks in seventeenth century Scotland, some further thoughts', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 12 (1992), 24–41.

⁸⁵ Thomas, *The History of Swansea*, 101–3.